

MEMORIAL
OF
JESSE E. DOW,

In relation to a route to the Pacific, via Tehuantepec, over a plank road.

FEBRUARY 17, 1849.

Referred to the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, and ordered to be printed.

To the honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The memorial of Jesse E. Dow, for himself and his associates, respectfully makes known that your memorialist, many years ago, after a careful examination of the subject, was convinced of the practicability and propriety of bringing the trade of Eastern India across the American continent, in the northern temperate zone, by means of an iron road and an iron horse.

Your memorialist would not, nor does he, assert that he first contemplated a western route to India, for Columbus, many years before, sought a path to Cathay, through the islands of the Caribbean sea; and Sebastian Cabot, and a host of others, a Chinese route amid the icy ribs of Labrador and the frozen billows of the north.

Your memorialist, therefore, while he seeks not to be placed amid the ancient discoverers of continents and the venerated pilgrims of the ocean, deems it nevertheless due to truth and his own honor to declare, in the legal phrase of the Patent Office, that he is an *original*, and he believes the first, projector of a central railroad from the Mississippi valley to the Pacific ocean; and that, before any one had made a public profession of their faith, to his knowledge, he had estimated the cost, and promulgated the plan of such a road.

While, therefore, your memorialist still considers a central railroad, opening our vast country to commerce and civilization, the prominent idea of the American mind for the present century, he, nevertheless, in view of our newly-acquired possessions in California, deems it of the highest importance that a short, speedy, safe, cheap and healthy way should be provided for the emigrant, the traveller, the merchant, and the man of arms between the Atlantic and the Pacific waters.

For this purpose, and in this view, he proposes a temporary route from Pensacola, over the gulf, 950 miles, and across the isthmus of Tehuantepec, running in connexion with the chain of railroads now completed from Portland, Maine, to Wilmington, North Carolina, and finished in parts between Wilmington and Pensacola. This can be done at small expense

and with little trouble, while the builders are laying down 27,000 millions of pounds of iron, the weight of a double tract for a railroad 1,800 miles in length through the heart of our country.

There is, according to Lieut. Boyle, of the navy, who was stationed at the port near the mouth of the river Huascoalco, 12 feet of water at low, and 14 feet at high, or full tide, in said harbor—a depth sufficient for any steamer or sailing vessel requisite for that trade; and at the gate of Tehuantepec, the sand-bar that extends across its threshold can be easily removed by a simple *dredging machine*, with but little labor and small expense. The line of steamers running from Panama, via San Francisco, to Oregon City, might easily be made to commence at the gulf of Tehuantepec, saving 1,200 miles in distance on the Pacific shore, and making up for their present compensation by additional trips.

This being effected, your memorialist proposes, by means of private enterprise, the consent of Mexico, and the aid of some of her citizens, to build and keep open, for the space of 10 years after its completion, a suitable plank road across the entire isthmus of Tehuantepec, over which, in connexion with lines of steamers from New Orleans and Pensacola, passengers, mails, troops, and munitions of war could be carried on wheels propelled by animal power in 14 days from Portland, Maine, and in seven days from Pensacola or New Orleans, and this, too, without binding our government by entangling alliances with any power, or calling for any other action on its part than a yearly appropriation of money, as a fair compensation for good and faithful service promptly rendered.

The line of this road is healthy, timber in any quantity can be procured there with ease, and the inhabitants are mostly of the Indian race, friends to Americans, excellent laborers and honest men. The services of these men can be had, at from four to six dollars per month, and after the completion of the road, they will guard it from robbers and pirates from either sea.

Your memorialist, in connexion with gentlemen of experience, enterprise, and unlimited means, is authorized to say, that a contract can be made between them and the United States for a period of ten years for this service for the same compensation that is proposed to be given for the service by the way of Panama, and that *bonds* to the satisfaction of the government will be executed for the faithful performance of the same. Tehuantepec is better situated as to water, than Panama and while it shortens the distance some 2,300 miles, it enables the passenger to enjoy the blessing of health, and puts him ten days nearer to his destined port—San Francisco.

From Portland, Maine, to Wilmington, North Carolina, a railroad running through eleven States, and connecting with their capitals, is now in daily use; from Wilmington to Manchester, South Carolina, a road is being built; from Manchester, connected with Charleston, a road is in operation to Atalanta, Georgia; from Atalanta to West Point, a railroad is in progress; from West Point to Montgomery, Alabama, a railroad is finished; and from Montgomery to Pensacola, a railroad is in progress; all of which will more fully appear on the map accompanying the report of the Hon. S. Breese, made to the Senate at the 1st session of the 30th Congress, in relation to a grant of land to the State of Illinois, to aid in the completion of her railroads. By means of the above railroads through the northern, middle, and southern States as far as Wilmington, North Carolina,

and by means of the roads in progress which can be completed in one year, if this plan is adopted, *the South, now sealed to commerce*, would have a *seaport at every railway station and landing places on the Atlantic and Pacific*. Fifteen States, including all the original THIRTEEN, but Rhode Island, are on the line of travel, and that State, by connecting links, is as near to the line as the extremes of the States through which the railway passes. The northern and middle States, the East and the West, by means of this road, and the Mississippi and its tributaries, would concentrate their rich products in the healthy part of the Gulf of Mexico, where vessels could sail or steam daily for the port of the Pacific road.

Temporary in its nature, and yet sufficient for its day, this road would never interfere with the great central railroad of the United States, but, on the contrary, by concentrating trade and giving it a direction West, would hasten the great work which will, when completed, give the United States the control of the commerce of the world, and make her as rich and powerful as she is now free and happy.

All of which is respectfully submitted by

JESSE E. DOW.

WASHINGTON, February 15, 1849.

and by means of the roads at present which can be completed in one year
it is plain that the South, now, as in the past, would have a
route in every railway station and passing station on the Atlantic and
Pacific. British states, including all the original railways, but Rhode
Island, reason the line of travel, and that State, by connecting line as
new to the line, as the route of the States through which the railway
passes. The northern and middle States, the West and the West by means
of the road, and the Mississippi and the Atlantic, would connect the
line with the line of the Gulf of Mexico, where vessels
could not, or scarcely, be taken on the Pacific coast.
It is plain that the line of travel, and the line of the United States, but on
new routes will be the great central railway of the United States, but on
the contrary, by concentrating trade and giving it a direction West, would
have the great work which will, when completed, give the United States
the control of the commerce of the world, and make her as rich and
powerful as she is now free and happy.

LESLIE B. DOW

Washington, February 16, 1882

My dear Sir,
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th inst., in relation to the proposed route of the Pacific coast, and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration. I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Yours, very truly,
Leslie B. Dow